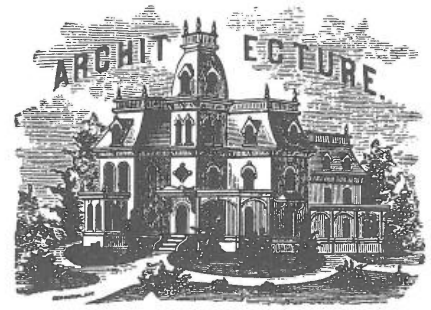


A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine



Edmund M. Wheelwright
1854-1912

Because of his outstanding municipal work as City Architect from 1891 to 1895, Edmund March Wheelwright is primarily associated with Boston, Massachusetts. Yet Wheelwright's ties with Maine were not only strong but spanned the entire length of his career.

Wheelwright was born in Roxbury, Massachusetts, on September 14, 1854, the son of Hannah and George W. Wheelwright. Although conservative by nature and temperament, Wheelwright matured within the liberal atmosphere provided by his printer and paper manu-

facturer father, attending Roxbury Latin School, graduating from Harvard in 1876, and specializing in architectural education at M.I.T. during 1876 and 1877.

Consistent with the traditional architectural training of that time, Wheelwright expanded his knowledge by working for several highly respected firms, including Peabody & Stearns in Boston; McKim, Mead & Bigelow in New York; and E.P. Treadwell in Albany. Although he never officially attended the Ecole des Beaux Arts, it was, nevertheless, an extended trip abroad in 1881 and 1882 that provided him with the aesthetic background and sensibilities that would inspire him throughout his professional career.

Following his exposure to this larger world, Wheelwright returned to Boston to open his architectural practice in 1883. By the late 1880's, he had become an established member of Boston's society as well as its architectural community, having married Elizabeth Boott Brooks in 1887, added Parkman B. Haven as his business partner in 1888, and gained a solid national reputation as an outstanding young architect. A dedicated member of his profession, Wheelwright not only served as Secretary of the Boston Society of Architects, but on the Board of Directors of the American Institute of Architects, having been elected a fellow in 1891.¹

Wheelwright's involvement with Maine had begun as early as 1883 when enthusiasm for the Penobscot Bay region led a group of Boston friends to establish a vacation colony on North Haven. A frequent visitor to that island, Wheelwright purchased property there in 1884, although he never built on the site.²



Figure 1. Islesboro Inn, c. 1905 view (MHPC).



Figure 2. Islesboro Inn, c. 1905 view (MHPC).

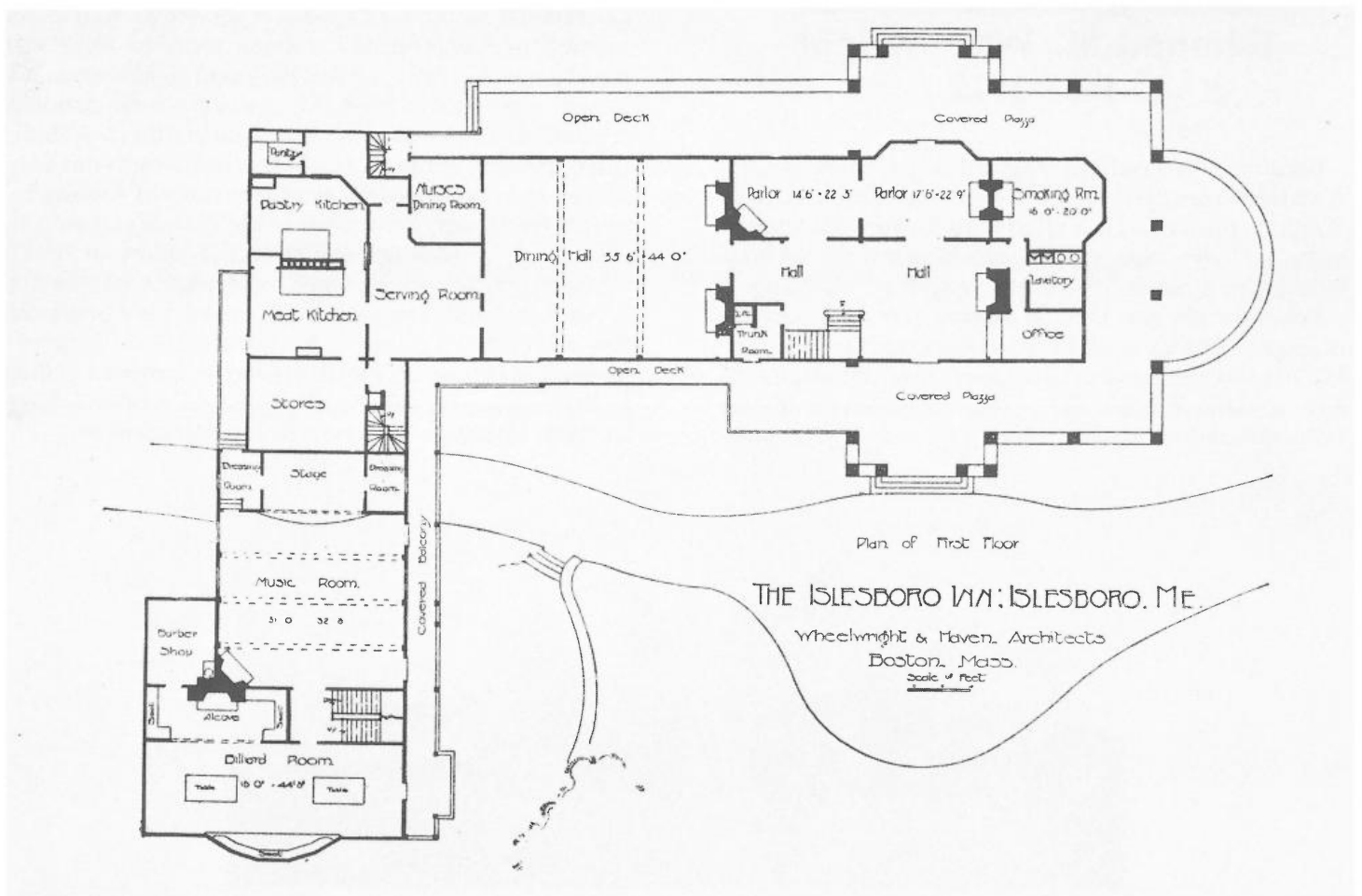


Figure 3. First floor plan, Islesboro Inn (MHPC).

Edmund Wheelwright's first known Maine commission came about this time when he designed "Stornoway" of 1884-85 in Northeast Harbor for the prominent Boston lawyer Moorfield Storey. The principal facade of this three-story shingled summer home acknowledged its debt to the Queen Anne style by featuring an asymmetrical fenestration pattern, a multi-gabled roof, and a rounded projecting bay. Because relating a design to the landscape was always an important consideration in Wheelwright's work, the cottage was located on a slope overlooking the water with a wrap-around porch and excellent window placement to ensure fine views. The open and functional floor plan was further refined in 1900 when Wheelwright and Haven executed alterations and an addition.³

During the later 1880's, the firm was selected to design a lodging place for several Pennsylvania businessmen who had formed a land development company on Islesboro. Proposing to establish a summer community on the island by selling property to friends and relatives, the group considered an inn essential to accommodate the prospective land purchasers.⁴

Magnificently sited on a commanding bluff overlooking Dark Harbor, the Islesboro Inn opened its doors for business on July 1, 1890 (Figures 1 & 2). It was described by a contemporary newspaper as "one of the very finest architectural ornaments to our coast",⁵ with an exterior facade that featured a graceful and unique roof outline of large gables with connecting roofs broken by dormers. The faces of the gables are of stucco work with wooden cross bars in the old English fashion. The lower part of the building is stone with broad verandas and porches, the roofs of which are carried on massive stone pillars.⁶

Not only was the dignified exterior appropriate for its specific clientele, but the straightforward interior floor plan created suitable spaces of simple elegance that included a ladies' parlor, gentlemen's smoking room, original art works, custom furnishings, oriental rugs, and carved oak furniture (Figure 3). As a visitor astutely noted, "Seated in one of these rooms we hardly realized that we are at an Inn at all. It is more like the parlor of a handsome and comfortable private residence."⁷ Indeed, the Islesboro Inn illustrated Wheelwright's skill in combining a classical architectural vocabulary with current stylistic elements and regional building materials while integrating the entire composition into its own sense of place.

The success of the island's development prompted an L shaped addition by the firm in 1892 which not only increased lodging accommodations but offered such amenities as a billiard room, barber shop, and music room. Until it was destroyed by fire in 1915, the Islesboro Inn remained a popular facility.⁸

A large shingled residence in York Harbor known as "The Haven" was also designed by the firm about 1890 (Figure 4). Built to accommodate the functional needs of its owner, Dr. F. D. Stackpole, the interior of the house utilized an open floor plan originating from the first floor entrance hall. The exterior design focused upon a gambrel roof that swept down over a central dormer to the recessed front entrance porch, while the two flanking side roof dormers formed the upper portions of projecting two-story polygonal bays.⁹

A decade later, in 1900, Wheelwright and Haven designed "Cracroft", a large shingled summer home for Edmund's brother George (Figures 5 & 6). Located on Vinalhaven looking across to North Haven, this rambling house with an open interior circulation plan



Figure 4. The Haven, Dr. F. D. Stackpole Cottage, York Harbor, c. 1920 view (Courtesy of Old York Historical Society).



Figure 5. Cracroft, George Wheelwright Cottage, Vinalhaven, 1986 view (MHPC).

and verandas that include a second story deck was sited to take advantage of the surrounding views. Although the water-side elevation was massed in a classically oriented format, the rear facade was created to surprise and delight the eye. Viewed from its rear garden, the effect of a three-story polygonal turreted tower, irregular chimney placement, uneven roof planes, and numerous angles and projections give the cottage an organic quality that hints of an ancient Norman farmhouse successfully adapted for the shore of a rugged New England island.

In 1909 Wheelwright and Haven designed a shingled gambrel-roof cottage on the property for George Wheelwright to accommodate two sons (Figure 7). Featuring an asymmetrical projecting facade gable and deeply recessed porches, this smaller house, known as "The Bungalow", reflects the same careful attention to siting, function, and detailing as the main residence.¹⁰

The firm was also responsible for a roof top addition to "Oaklands" in Gardiner, the Gardiner family home designed in 1835 by Richard Upjohn. The multi-gabled roof that Wheelwright and Haven designed, circa 1905, lent a picturesque quality to the house, but the original roof line was later restored.¹¹

The final known Maine commission, a structure for the Eastern Maine General Hospital in Bangor of 1908-09, illustrates the versatility of the firm's technical expertise. During his service as City Architect of Boston in the 1890's, Wheelwright had responded to the cultural pressures of that decade of urbanization by producing nearly 100 municipal buildings. His experience with public facilities led to many similar commissions

when he returned to private practice. The simple Georgian Revival brick elements that were incorporated into the Children's Ward of Bangor's hospital were typical of Wheelwright's earlier municipal designs.¹²

Although he died at the age of fifty-eight on August 14, 1912 in a Connecticut sanitarium following a long bout with depression, Edmund Wheelwright left behind a legacy of excellence in structures that were not only highly regarded by his contemporaries, but have stood the test of time.¹³ In Boston, countless examples of his skill continue to make viable contributions. The graceful Longfellow Bridge remains as useful as when it was opened in 1907; Horticultural Hall, constructed at the turn of the century and recently renovated, functions as a place of integrity and beauty; while many schools scattered across the city still serve — some in their original capacity, others adapted successfully to new roles. Moreover, regardless of the building style or type, Wheelwright's structures go beyond the important criteria of visual satisfaction, sound craftsmanship, and functional operation; for they possess a quality of belonging to their specific physical environment, thereby offering a unique sense of place. The Maine designs of Edmund March Wheelwright, although not as numerous as those in the Boston area, are equally as successful, and, indeed, demonstrate a facet of his career that has only recently been rediscovered.

Carole A. Jensen
March, 1987



Figure 6. Cracroft, George Wheelwright Cottage, 1986 view (MHPC).



Figure 7. The Bungalow, Wheelwright Family Cottage, Vinalhaven, 1986 view (MHPC).

NOTES

- ¹ Information about Wheelwright's life and career is found in the Wheelwright family papers at the Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.
- ² Caroline T. Daniels, *Dark Harbor*, Cambridge, 1935, p. 52. Wheelwright's presence on North Haven in 1883 is verified by his signature in Francis W. Chandler's guest register, *North Haven Paralyso Register*, in the possession of his granddaughter, Barbara Lannon of North Haven.
- ³ Plans for Stornoway are in the Gerrish Collection, Northeast Harbor Library.
- ⁴ Daniels, op. cit., pp. 5-7.
- ⁵ *Mount Desert Herald*, July 4, 1890.
- ⁶ *Mount Desert Herald*, op. cit.
- ⁷ *Mount Desert Herald*, op. cit.
- ⁸ Daniels, op. cit., pp. 14-17.
- ⁹ *The Engineering and Building Record*, New York, August 16, 1890, p. 163. York Historic Landmarks Architectural Survey form, original on file at the Old York Historical Society.
- ¹⁰ Information about Cracroft and the Bungalow was obtained from George Wheelwright's grandson, Henry DeForest Lockwood, their present owner.
- ¹¹ Blueprints for Wheelwright and Haven's changes to Oaklands are owned by the Gardiner family.
- ¹² *The Industrial Journal*, Bangor, September, 1909, p. 11.
- ¹³ Wheelwright family papers, op. cit.

ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS

Architectural drawings for the following of Wheelwright's Maine commissions have been located: Moorfield Storey Cottage, Northeast Harbor Library; George Wheelwright Cottage, Henry DeForest Lockwood; Oaklands, Gardiner family; Eastern Maine General Hospital Annex, Haven & Hoyt Collection at the Boston Public Library.

LIST OF KNOWN COMMISSIONS IN MAINE BY EDMUND M. WHEELWRIGHT

"Stornoway", Moorfield Storey Cottage, Northeast Harbor, 1884-85, 1900, Extant.
Islesboro Inn, Islesboro, 1890, 1892, Destroyed.
"The Haven", Dr. F. D. Stackpole Cottage, York Harbor, c. 1890, Extant.
"Cracroft", George Wheelwright Cottage, Vinalhaven, 1900, Extant.
"Oaklands", Gardiner Mansion, Gardiner, roof alteration, c. 1905, Removed.
"The Bungalow", George Wheelwright Cottage for his sons, Vinalhaven, 1909, Extant.
Eastern Maine General Hospital Annex, Bangor, 1909, Extant.

Photograph of Edmund M. Wheelwright
Courtesy of the Author.

Volume IV, Number 13, 1987

Published by the Maine Historic Preservation Commission
55 Capitol Street, Augusta, Maine 04333
Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr., Editor
Roger G. Reed, Associate Editor

*This publication has been financed in part with federal funds from
the National Park Service, Department of the Interior.*